

But Nick would have none of it. He told his little sister:

Just always know that I did it for us and I did it for them. This was my destiny given by God and I have to fulfill it.

SSG Nicholas R. Carnes represented the very best his town, his State, and his Nation have to offer. His service and his sacrifice prove it. The Senate is proud to honor men like him who see that America needs defending and bravely step forward to defend it.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT *pro tempore*. The Senator from Hawaii is recognized.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS IN THE 110TH CONGRESS

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, as we prepare to return to our home States, I believe it is important to remind our colleagues about the work we have done for the veterans of this Nation. As Chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I have had the privilege of working with almost every entity and level of Government, veterans and military service organizations across the Nation, and every branch of the military, in an ongoing effort to better serve those who have served us.

In the past 19 months, the committee has held over 50 hearings, taking testimony from over 320 witnesses. The committee staff has carried out over 140 days of investigations and visits across the country. I commend the hard-working members of our committee, on both sides of the aisle, for their work this session.

After years of underfunding veterans programs, I wish to remind everyone that this Congress appropriated the largest increase in the history of the Department of Veterans Affairs. These funds are helping to provide better health care to veterans and enabling the Veterans Benefits Administration to hire thousands of new employees. It is my profound hope this investment will produce marked improvements in care and in reduced backlog of veterans' disability claims. Last year, in connection with the disclosures about Walter Reed, America learned of the disgraceful treatment of some of our disabled servicemembers and veterans. Congress responded promptly and the Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs Committees collaborated in an unprecedented manner to address the issues at Walter Reed and elsewhere. One result of this cooperation was the wounded warrior provisions included in last year's National Defense Authorization Act.

I take special pride in one particular wounded warrior provision which more than doubled the period of automatic VA health care eligibility for returning troops. Servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan are now eligible for 5 years of VA health care upon separation from service.

I am also pleased with the work we have done in seeking an expanded out-

reach to veterans of the National Guard and Reserve. It is vital that the growing role they play in our all-volunteer military be recognized and that those who have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan be recognized and helped.

Congress also enacted the 21st Century GI bill of rights. Like others who served in World War II, I personally know how that GI bill changed our country for the better. I hope this improved benefit will provide similar help for today's and tomorrow's troops.

But for all we have done, much remains unfinished in these waning weeks. Important legislation is pending in both the House and the Senate. To name two bills, we are still waiting for action on S. 1315 and S. 2162.

S. 1315, the Veterans' Benefits Enhancement Act of 2007, would provide needed assistance to veterans young and old, including the Filipino veterans of World War II who served under U.S. command but were denied veterans status for over 60 years.

S. 2162 is the Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvements Act of 2008. This bill responds to the growing need among veterans for high quality mental health care. Many veterans return from war suffering from invisible wounds. If left untreated, these wounds can infect a veteran's life and livelihood, with dire consequences. The bill represents a tribute to Justin Bailey, a young Iraq veteran who overdosed while under VA care. We must not let other veterans suffer a similar tragedy.

Both of these bills passed the Senate with unanimous or nearly unanimous support, and both count strong supporters in the House. I hope that before this session ends, we will see both become law.

I do not report today that our work for veterans is anywhere near done, but I do say it is work in progress. I thank my colleagues in both Chambers and both parties for their support and cooperation.

TRIBUTE TO WILLIAM BREW

Mr. AKAKA. Mr. President, as chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I normally come to the Senate floor and speak on various veterans issues—I advocate for increased screening and treatment and mental health issues for our veterans; I remind my fellow Senators that veterans of their home States must file income taxes for 2008 in order to receive their tax rebates; I argue for increased funding for VA's vital mission; and I urge the Senate to approve a new GI bill. Today, however, I come to the Senate floor to speak about one particular veteran—a Vietnam veteran who has dedicated his long career, enormous talents, and tireless efforts to better the treatment and the lives of all who have served our Nation in uniform. Today, I will speak of my staff director, William Brew.

Bill has just completed 20 years of service to the Senate. His entire tenure

in the Senate has been at the Committee on Veterans' Affairs. Bill started in the Senate on April 3, 1978. At that time, his desk was in what is now the committee's hearing room. The chairman was Alan Cranston of California. The major issues were Agent Orange, judicial review, and the emerging medical condition that had newly been labeled post-traumatic stress disorder. As a former naval officer, and a lawyer, Bill was thrown right into these issues, and his presence made a huge difference.

An immediate and pressing need was to provide psychological counseling to Vietnam veterans at a time when the war and, sadly, even those who fought in it, remained a divisive issue for our Nation. Men and women who had served during that conflict did not return to heroes' welcomes, yellow ribbons, and joyous neighborhood celebrations we so often see today. In 1980, in Van Nuys, CA, one of the very first vet centers opened and offered a means of providing community-based counseling and outreach services to those who were returning from Southeast Asia. Now, there are 232 scattered around the country.

Millions of veterans and their families from all wars have received counseling and support through these centers. Bill was instrumental in developing the legislation that established these facilities and was present at the creation of vet centers.

Bill was deeply involved in the debates surrounding Agent Orange and quickly became an expert on an issue whose vocabulary revolved around dioxin, defoliation, Ranch Hand, and a variety of health problems and concerns. His efforts contributed to the development of wide-ranging initiatives designed to address the needs of those who believe their exposure has adversely affected their health.

Bill was instrumental in the passage of legislation in 1996, which fundamentally changed the law with regard to eligibility for VA health care. Eligibility Reform, as this law is known, eradicated the line between inpatient and outpatient care. VA, for the first time, was authorized to provide a standard benefits package of services in the most appropriate care setting. This seemingly simple change enabled VA to open up community-based clinics all across this country. Veterans care has been dramatically improved because of the increased access to the now 700 clinics dotting the landscape.

Assisting disabled veterans to reenter civilian life has always been a high priority for the committee. Bill worked on legislation to revamp federally assisted State vocational rehabilitation programs, giving priority to the most seriously disabled.

Bill was instrumental in the establishment of the Court of Veterans Claims, which gave judicial review to veterans' benefit determinations, and the committee recently approved legislation to expand the Court.

It is little known that Bill has served on both sides of the aisle, working not only for Chairmen Cranston and Rockefeller, and now myself, but also working for Chairman Alan Simpson, my Republican colleague from Wyoming. In 1980, when the Democrats entered the minority, Bill remained a majority staff member under Chairman Simpson for 9 months before returning to Ranking Member Cranston's staff.

I congratulate Bill for his service and tell him that I am grateful for that, and to thank him for his 20 years of dedicated and faithful service to the Senate and to our Nation's veterans.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Missouri.

ENDING THE GAS PRICE CRISIS

Mr. BOND. Mr. President, I am here today to point out what I believe everybody in this body knows, certainly everybody back in the heartland, where the occupant of the chair and I live: America is suffering a gas price crisis. I regret to tell the people back home that the Senate is in a crisis of its own.

It appears that Democrats are desperate to deny real gas price relief. They are apparently united behind the misguided policy of the presumptive Democratic nominee for President who says: Don't provide any new sources of supply. They are doing anything they can to block the one real solution to this gas price.

Opening new offshore drilling will bring suffering American families 18 billion barrels of new oil supplies. News of America's commitment to new supplies will drive prices down immediately. We saw with the suggestion that we would be opening offshore when the President lifted the Executive moratorium on offshore drilling, that the prices came down immediately \$10 and then came down roughly \$20 because the price of oil today is influenced by the long-term judgment of what the price will be in the future.

Airlines, trucking companies, and others have to go out in the futures market to buy the oil they need in the future. Those who bought futures contracts at \$90 turned out to be prescient. They saved money from the \$145 a barrel oil we see today. But right now there are too many hedgers, too many investors, and, yes, even some speculators, too many investors, including the Public Employee Retirement Systems of California, and of local governments that are saying: Hey, if we don't open oil supplies, we are going to see that \$145 a barrel oil go to \$175 and \$200 and \$250.

Regrettably, if the policy of the Democrats being acted on in the Senate today holds, we will see those oil prices going above \$200 a barrel and over \$5 at the gas pump. The Democrats, in lockstep with their Presidential nominee, are doing anything they can to block the one real solution: News of America's commitment to new

supplies and oil will drive down the prices immediately. New supplies, 10 years' worth in the case of offshore reserves, will drive prices lower for years to come.

Some may say it will take a long time to bring it on line. That is what President Clinton said in 1995 when he vetoed the authorization to open ANWR, which could have been producing a million barrels of oil a day. He said it wouldn't happen for 10 years. Well, it is now 13 years past that veto. We surely could use that additional million barrels of oil a day.

The Democratic leader, when it comes to lowering gas prices with new offshore supplies, says: "No, we can't." Actually, in the case of the Senate Democrats, it is "No, we won't," reflecting the views of their Presidential nominee.

Earlier this month, I tried to join with my colleagues to repeal the legislative moratorium preventing new offshore drilling off our Atlantic and Pacific coasts. With the high gas prices facing our families, it is time to end the offshore drilling ban included each year on the annual appropriations bill for the Department of the Interior.

Much to my surprise and regret, the Democratic leadership canceled the planned business meeting to consider and write the Interior appropriations bill. We thought we would succeed. We thought people would understand that bringing gas price relief to America's families by reversing the current ban on offshore drilling could meet the cry from our people back home to do something about the price of gas. But the Democratic leadership canceled the meeting to prevent the will of the people through their Senators from being heard.

Now we have confirmation. We have seen a statement from the Appropriations Committee that the Democrats thought they would lose the vote and fail in their attempt to keep new oil supplies from the American people. It came from the Appropriations Committee itself saying they did not want to see the offshore opened for drilling. That is not the way this body is supposed to work.

We disagree with a lot of things, but we at least ought to come to the floor and have a vote. Those who are for it and those who are against it, let them take their stand in public and let the people judge.

Now we are on the floor of the Senate trying to move to a bill supposedly on energy. We have asked for a debate and a vote on measures in addition to their measure on speculation, because speculation is a small part. What we need to do is get more supplies.

The plan of Republican Senators and our presumptive nominee for President, the Senator from Arizona, is to enact additional measures that will lower gas prices through additional supplies from offshore oil reserves, tap billions of barrels of oil in Rocky Mountain oil shale deposits, provide

clean nuclear-powered electricity that can drive our next generation of hybrid cars and trucks, and give financial help to jump-start our U.S. manufacturing supply base for hybrid car batteries to bring their prices down and put people in America to work.

But now the Democratic leadership has gone back on this offer. They have reneged on this offer. It is like Lucy with the football. The American people, we feel like Charlie Brown and the football is lowering gas prices. They are offering to let Charlie Brown kick the football to get a vote on opening offshore oil reserves and see if he can score a goal for lower gas prices. But, wait, the leadership of the Democratic Party on this floor has yanked the oil supply football away, only to let the American people swing and miss. The Democratic leadership apparently instead wants to move the goalposts back to pay for new wind and solar incentives.

I support wind and solar incentives. The whole Senate voted for wind and solar incentives earlier this year, adopting an amendment by over 80 votes. How many times do you have to do that? But the Democrats yanked the football away as well. They added new taxes to that measure. I guess they figured something so popular would be a good opportunity to raise taxes. That seems to be the policy of their nominee for President.

I can tell you that the people of Missouri do not want higher taxes. They do not want us to make it harder to find and produce oil. More wind and solar power is not going to get gas prices down now or anytime in the future. Not a single trucker in Missouri will pay less for diesel because we pass a bill for wind power. Not a single Missouri family will suffer less pain at the pump because we pass a bill for solar power. Not a single farmer will pay less to run his tractors or less to send his produce to market.

The only real thing that will work to get gas prices down is fundamental—more oil supplies to scare away the speculators and meet the demand.

Missouri does not need more hot air from the Democrats. Energy summits where Washington politicians talk about how much they claim they care about families will not get the gas prices down. And yet, the Senator from Illinois, the Democratic presumptive nominee for President, was in Missouri, and he had a solution for the gas price crisis. He said we need to keep our tires fully inflated.

I agree with keeping our tires fully inflated. I am told by the studies of the Department of Transportation that can save 6 to 12 gallons of gasoline a year. So please keep your tires inflated. But suggestions to inflate our tires fully are not going to make a significant difference in the gas price.

America deserves more than Democratic hot air. Here it is hot air to inflate our tires. On the floor of the Senate, it is hot air to tell us everything